

# T H E L O U N G E R.

[ N<sup>o</sup> XLII. ]

Saturday, Nov. 19. 1785.

To the AUTHOR of the LOUNGER.

S I R,

**I** Was much pleased with the mention, made by your friend Colonel Caustic, of our poet *Hamilton* of Bangour. I have always regarded him as holding a distinguished rank among the fine writers of his age, and as having done signal credit to the genius of his country. Yet his works do not appear to me to be so well known, nor to be held in such high esteem, as they deserve. Permit me, therefore, to recommend them to your readers.

The poems of *Hamilton* display regular design, just sentiments, fanciful invention, pleasing sensibility, elegant diction, and smooth versification. His genius was aided by taste, and his taste was improved by knowledge. He was not only well acquainted with the most elegant modern writers, but with those of antiquity. Of these remarks, his poem, intitled *Contemplation*, or *The Triumph of Love*, affords sufficient illustration.

The design of this Poem is regular. The Poet displays in it the struggles, relapses, recoveries, and final discomfiture of a mind striving with an obstinate and habituated passion. It has, in the language of the critics, a beginning, a middle, and an end. It exhibits an action in its rise, progress, and termination. The Poet represents himself as wishing to withdraw his thoughts from inferior subjects, and fix them on such as he holds better suited to a rational, and still more to a philosophical spirit. He must be aided in this high exercise by *Contemplation*: and the assistance of this august personage must be duly solicited. Accordingly the Poem opens with a fine address to the "Voice divine," the Power of Poetry.

Go forth invoc'd, O voice divine!  
And issue from thy sacred shrine;  
Go, search each solitude around  
Where Contemplation may be found, &c.

But *Contemplation* must not only be duly solicited, but properly received and attended; and therefore a company of various but suitable associates are invited:

Bring Faith, endued with eagle eyes,  
That joins this earth to distant skies, &c.—  
Devotion, high above that soars,  
And sings exulting, and adores, &c.—  
Last, to crown all, with these be join'd  
The decent nun, fair Peace of Mind,  
Whom Innocence, e'er yet betray'd,  
Bore young in Eden's happy shade;  
Resign'd, contented, meek, and mild,  
Of blameless mother, blameless child.

In like manner, such passions as are adverse to *Contemplation* are very properly prohibited; and in this catalogue are included, among others, Superstition, Zeal, Hypocrisy, Malice, and all inhuman affections. The Poet seems chiefly solicitous to prohibit Love. Of him and his intrusion he appears particularly apprehensive. Yet, in the confidence of his present mood, he would disguise his apprehensions, and treats this formidable adversary, not only with defiance, but with contempt.

But chiefly Love, Love, far off fly,  
Nor interrupt my privacy.  
'Tis not for thee, capricious pow'r,  
Weak tyrant of a feverish hour,  
Fickle, and ever in extremes,  
My radiant day of Reason beams;  
And sober Contemplation's ear,  
Disdains thy fyren tongue to hear.  
Speed thee on changeful wings away  
To where thy willing slaves obey.

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Go,

Go, herd amongst thy wonted train,  
The false, th' inconstant, and the vain;  
Thou hast no subject here; begone!  
Contemplation comes anon.

The action proceeds. The Poet attends to solemn objects: engages in important inquiries: considers the diversified condition of human life: dwells on the ample provision made by nature for human happiness: dwells on the happiness of social affections: is thus led imperceptibly to think of love: mentions Monimia, and relapses.

Ah me! What, helpless, have I said?  
Unhappy, by myself betrayed!  
I deem'd, but ah! I deem'd in vain,  
From the dear image to refrain, &c.

He makes another effort; but with equal success: he makes another, and another: he will exalt his mind by acts of devotion, or plunge into the gloom of melancholy. But the influences of the predominant passion still return to the charge, and restore their object: on the heights of devotion, or in the shades of melancholy, he still meets with Monimia. Such is the progress of the Poem; and in the conclusion, we have an interesting view of the Poet, yielding to his adversary, but striving to be resigned.

Pass but some fleeting moments o'er,  
This rebel heart shall beat no more, &c.

The justness of the Poet's sentiments is next to be mentioned. He illustrates the power of habituated passion over reason and reflection. Still farther, he illustrates, that though the attention be engaged with objects of the most opposite kind to that of the reigning passion, yet still it returns. He shews too, that this happens, notwithstanding the most determined resolutions and purposes to the contrary. All this he does not formally, but by ingenious and indirect insinuation. He also illustrates a curious process in the conduct of our intellectual powers, when under the dominion of strong emotion. He shews the manner by which prevailing passions influence our thoughts in the association of ideas: that they do not throw their objects upon the mind abruptly, or without coherence, but proceed by a regular progress; for that, how different soever ideas or objects may be from one another, the prevailing or habituated passion renders the mind acute in discerning among them common qualities, or circumstances of agreement or correspondence, otherwise latent, or not obvious: that these common qualities are dexterously used by the mind, as uniting links, or means of transition: and that thus, not incoherently, but by the natural connection most commonly of resemblance, the ruling passion brings its own object to the fore ground, and into perfect view. Thus our Poet, in the progress of his action, has recourse to friendship. He dwells on the happiness that connection bestows; he wishes for a faithful friend; his imagination figures such a person,

In whose soft and gentle breast,  
His weary soul may take her rest;

and then, by easy transition, invests this friend with a female form, with the form of Monimia:

Grant, Heaven, if Heaven means bliss for me,  
Monimia such and long may be.

In like manner, having recourse to devotion, in a spirit of rational piety, he solicits the aid of Heaven to render him virtuous. He personifies Virtue; places her in a triumphal car, attended by a suitable train; one of her attendants, a female distinguished by high pre-eminence, must also be distinguished by superior beauty, must resemble the fairest of human beings, must resemble Monimia:

While chief in beauty, as in place,  
She charms with dear Monimia's grace.  
Monimia still, here once again!  
O! fatal name; O dubious strain, &c.—  
Far off the glorious rapture flown,  
Monimia rages here alone.

In vain, Love's fugitive, I try  
 From the commanding power to fly, &c.—  
 Why didst thou, cruel Love, again  
 Thus drag me back to earth and pain?  
 Well hop'd I, Love, thou wouldst retire  
 Before the blest'd Jessoan lyre.  
 Devotion's harp would charm to rest,  
 The evil spirit in my breast.  
 But the deaf adder still disdains  
 To listen to the chanter's strains.

The whole Poem illustrates the difficulty and necessity of governing our thoughts, no less than our passions.

In enumerating the most remarkable qualities in Hamilton's poetical works, besides regularity of design, and justness of thought or sentiment, I mentioned fanciful invention; and of this particular I shall, in like manner, offer some illustration.

Fanciful invention is, in truth, the quality that, of all others, distinguishes, and is chiefly characteristic of poetical composition. The beauties of design, sentiment, and language, belong to every kind of fine writing: but invention alone creates the Poet, and is a term nearly of the same signification with poetical genius. A poet is said to have more or less genius, according to his powers of fancy or invention. That Hamilton possesses a considerable portion of this talent, is manifest in many of his compositions, and particularly so in his *Contemplation*. This appears evident from some passages already quoted. But though our poet possesses powers of invention, he is not endowed with all the powers of invention, nor with those of every kind. His genius seems qualified for describing some beautiful scenes and objects of external nature, and for delineating with the embellishments of allegory, some passions and affections of the human mind.

Still, however, his imagination is employed among beautiful and engaging, rather than among awful and magnificent images; and even when he presents us with dignified objects, he is more grave than lofty, more solemn than sublime; as in the following passage.

Now see! the spreading gates unfold,  
 Display'd the sacred leaves of gold.  
 Let me with holy awe repair  
 To the solemn house of prayer;  
 And as I go, O thou! my heart,  
 Forget each low and earthly part.  
 Religion enter in my breast,  
 A mild and venerable guest!  
 Put off, in contemplation drown'd,  
 Each thought impure in holy ground;  
 And cautious tread with awful fear  
 The courts of heaven;—for God is here.  
 Now my grateful voice I raise,  
 Ye angels, swell a mortal's praise,  
 To charm with your own harmony  
 The ear of him who sits on high.

It was also said, that our Poet possessed pleasing sensibility. It is not asserted that he displays those vehement tumults and ecstasies of passion, that belong to the higher kinds of Lyric and Dramatic composition. He is not shaken with excessive rage, nor melted with overwhelming sorrow; yet when he treats of grave or affecting subjects, he expresses a plaintive and engaging softness. He is never violent and abrupt, and is more tender than pathetic. Perhaps the "Braes of Yarrow," one of the finest ballads ever written, may put in a claim to superior distinction. But even with this exception, I should think our Poet more remarkable for engaging tenderness, than for deep and affecting pathos. Of this his epitaph beginning with, "Could this fair marble," affords illustration.

In like manner, when he expresses joyful sentiments, or describes scenes and objects of festivity, which he does very often, he displays good humour and easy cheerfulness, rather than the transports of mirth, or the brilliancy of wit. In one of the best of his Poems, addressed to Lady Mary Montgomery, he adorns sprightli-

ness



ness of thought, graceful ease, and good humour, with corresponding language and numbers. In this performance, a number of female characters are described in the liveliest manner, characterised with judgement, and distinguished with acute discernment. Thus, in the following indirect description, we have the dignity of female excellence.

—Heavenly Charlotte, form divine,  
Love's universal kingdom's thine :  
Anointed Queen ! all unconfin'd,  
Thine is the homage of mankind.

In another passage, we have a fine picture of the gentler and livelier graces :

In everlasting blushes seen,  
Such Pringle shines, of sprightly mein :  
To her the power of love imparts,  
Rich gift ! the soft successful arts,  
That best the lover's fires provoke,  
The lively step, the mirthful joke ;  
The speaking glance, the am'rous wile,  
The sportful laugh, the winning smile ;  
Her soul awak'ning every grace,  
Is all abroad upon her face ;  
In bloom of youth still to survive,  
All charms are there, and all alive.

Elsewhere we have a melodious beauty.

Artist divine ! to her belong  
The heavenly lay, and magic song, &c. —  
Whene'er she speaks, the joy of all,  
Soft the silver accents fall, &c.

The transitions in this poem are peculiarly happy. Such are the following :

Strike again the golden lyre,  
Let Hume the notes of joy inspire, &c. —  
But who is she, the general gaze  
Of sighing crowds, the world's amaze,  
Who looks forth as the blushing morn,  
On mountains of the east new born, &c. —  
Fair is the lily, sweet the rose,  
That in thy cheek, O Drummond, glows, &c.

I have dwelt so long, and I could not avoid it, on the preceding particulars, that I have not left myself room for illustrations of our Poet's language and versification. I observed, in general, that these were elegant and melodious: and so every reader of genuine taste will feel them. They are not, however, unexceptionable; and if in another letter I should give farther illustration of our author's poetical character, I shall hold myself bound, not only to mention some excellencies, but also some blemishes in his verse and diction. I am, &c.

PHILOMUSOS.

I have given the above letter, which I received some time ago from an unknown correspondent, to my readers, from a belief that they will feel themselves interested in the Works of a Poet who not only was born and resided in *Scotland*, but whose pencil was particularly employed in delineating the eminent characters of both sexes in our native country at the time in which he lived. It will not, methinks, require the enthusiasm of a "laudator temporis acti," like Colonel Caustic, to receive a peculiar satisfaction in tracing the virtues and the beauty of a former age, in the verses of one who appears to have so warmly caught the spirit of the first, to have so warmly felt the power of the latter. Nor may it be altogether without a moral use, to see, in the poetical record of a former period, the manners of our own country in times of less luxury, but not perhaps of less refinement; when Fashion seems to have conferred superiorities fully as intrinsic as any she can boast at present; to have added dignity of sentiment to pride of birth, and to have invested superior beauty with superior grace and higher accomplishments.

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